JRTC
National Guard LRS Lessons

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The Army's Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) offers a realistic training environment that can help hone the leadership skills and the tactical proficiency of long range surveillance (LRS) units, especially those in the U.S. Army Reserve and the Army National Guard.

My unit of the Maryland Army National Guard trained at the JRTC. On the basis of my experience as an LRS team leader in that rotation, I would like to share some of the lessons we learned.

To train and then perform well at the JRTC, a National Guard LRS team leader must focus his attention on several phases which, when well executed, will produce favorable results and invaluable lessons.

Developing Unit METL

Since an LRS team is essentially self-supporting when it is deployed, extensive pre-deployment planning is required. The team leader must come up with a focused mission essential task list (METL) and an effective plan for implementing it. And he must do this as far in advance as possible, working closely with the detachment or company commander. The result should be a METL that satisfies the training needs of both the individual team members and the unit, and that includes several key areas.

The first, and possibly most important, of these areas is communications training, particularly for the junior team members, who will be expected to help the radio telephone operator (RTO) in addition to conducting surveillance. They must be trained to the team standard on communications procedures, antenna construction, and the use of reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) devices.

The second important aspect to be trained is patrolling, because the deploying LRS teams have to be able to depend upon each other in the field. It is particularly important to ensure that team standing operating procedures (SOPs) are developed and practiced, and that immediate action drills become second nature. SOPs for hide-site construction and surveillance techniques should also be established and practiced.

For a National Guard LRS unit, these tasks require focused and well-planned training. This training should enable each team member to serve in a duty position at least one level above his own. An excellent tool that allows team development to continue between drills is the LRS correspondence course. It provides excellent review and reference material, and it is a prerequisite for the Reserve Component LRS Course offered at Fort Benning, Georgia. Team leaders should regularly monitor the progress of their team members, however, to ensure that they derive the maximum benefit from the course.

A National Guard LRS team can expect to receive its JRTC mission several months ahead of its deployment date. Team leaders must do extensive mission planning outside of their scheduled drills to allow for METL training during the drills. Specifically, the leader must task the team members with appropriate parts of the planning process. This will do two things: It will build the skills and confidence of each team member, and it will help build a cohesive reconnaissance team with a higher esprit de corps.

When the mission is issued, the leader should be aware that it may change several times before deployment. It is probably best, therefore, to develop a flexible, general operations plan that can readily be changed before infiltration.

Additionally, the LRS leader should relentlessly pump the S-2 for information about enemy disposition, locations, strength, and particularly for recent aerial photographs of the area in which the team will be operating. Overlays should be made of routes, avenues of approach, landing zones (LZs) and pickup zones (PZs), and points to be observed. The aerial photos can be used to update map information, and the team members should study the information until they can brief all phases of the mission using a sterile map.

There is always a possibility that the LRS team will be issued an unrealistic mission. There are many possible reasons for this, not the least of which is a lack of understanding of the LRS concept. The LRS has a different mission from that of a scout platoon or a Special Forces reconnaissance element. This problem can be corrected by briefing commanders and staffs on LRS capabilities, missions, and limitations. Since the LRS unit is often the first ground

intelligence asset, it can provide crucial information to intelligence and maneuver units when it is properly used. But the reconnaissance teams have physical limitations, and the tasking agencies must understand this.

Once deployed to the infiltration support base, the team will begin its isolation and final preparations for infiltration. If possible, the LRS teams should be deployed to the isolation base well ahead of the maneuver force—another fact that may have to be explained to the tasking agencies. This early deployment allows the teams to become acclimated and to isolate properly before their insertion.

Isolation must be effectively coordinated with the JRTC staff. At the time of our deployment, for example, we were not provided with an isolation area, and had only limited areas for rehearsal or maneuver. Eventually (24 hours before insertion time), we received an isolation room that both deploying teams had to share. Although this was not an ideal situation, the isolation was played out as realistically as possible to get the full training value. In cases where an isolation area is not provided, the team can move into the field and establish its own security while planning.

Whether in an established isolation area or a field area, isolation procedures must be enforced. Team members must not discuss their mission with anyone outside their team and the headquarters element. Liaison officers should be used as much as possible for coordination between the team and external agencies. This not only helps enforce the isolation, it also frees the team leader to complete his mission planning.

Isolation also allows for a more focused reaction to changes in the mission, which should be expected and may come rapidly. Our team received several mission changes from the time we received our initial operations order to the time we were inserted. Some of these changes occurred during our last 24 hours of isolation.

The use of subordinates and good task organization will build cohesion and keep team members involved and well informed. A failure to do this may leave the team leader burned out by infiltration time, and the team will be not be as well prepared. A good, highly coordinated isolation area will also ease the planning for infiltration, exfiltration, escape and evasion, and resupply—all of which are vital to mission accomplishment. These plans must be highly detailed and well coordinated, because each will reduce the team's chances of compromise.

During the air mission brief, the leader should make sure the supporting aviation units get a thorough briefing on the area of operations. The briefing

should use both maps and aerial photographs to reduce the team's chances of being inserted into the wrong LZ, for example.

Isolation also allows the team to make uninterrupted final preparations. During this time, the team leader can ensure that the soldiers fully understand the SOPs for equipment and sensitive items, that uniforms are "sterilized," and that the MILES (multiple integrated laser engagement system) gear is zeroed to the weapons. He can also see that each team member is carrying roughly the same load; cross-loading helps ensure that the team will still be capable of completing its mission if it loses a team member.

The team should be camouflaged for the environment; burlap strips and pieces of camouflage netting are a simple but effective way of doing this. Additionally, the team will use isolation time to make sure communications and RSTA equipment is functioning properly. A team using AM communications should ensure that the frequencies have been disseminated on a need-to-know basis and will work over the distances involved. All equipment must function to specification, and all team members must know how to use it. A team that cannot rapidly and accurately report intelligence is obviously less effective than it might be.

Water resupply is another important aspect of mission planning, because dehydration can lead to decreased efficiency and to real medical emergencies. Because of the enemy situation and the local weather, local resupply may not be a feasible option at the JRTC. Each of our deploying teams carried two full five-gallon water cans with them. One team rigged the cans so they could be carried by a two-man team. The other team carried them in rucksacks, which worked much more effectively.

The final part of isolation is the briefback to the commander, which representatives of the tasking agency should also attend. This briefing is extremely important because it lets the commander know whether the team is truly prepared for the mission. Each team member must be prepared to brief his part of the mission, and the team leader will probably be asked to estimate the team's chances of mission accomplishment, and to explain why. His failure to be honest in this assessment, either with his superiors or himself, can lead his team to mission failure or, in the real world, to death or capture. During this briefback, it is also possible that problems noted can be corrected quickly so that the team can deploy.

During the mission phase, there is one important thing for the leader to remember: Although good planning, coordination, and rehearsals will reduce the possibility of error or misfortune, things are still likely to go wrong at some time during the mission. During our training, for example, one team inserted during limited visibility, moved to its first mission support site, and sent out a surveillance team. At

dawn, however, it became apparent that they were located in the middle of the enemy's brigade support area, and the team sustained 50 percent casualties.

The LRS team must make the most of limited visibility, terrain masking, and stealth. Cover and concealment are limited at the JRTC, and movement is channeled, affecting friendly and enemy units equally.

During movement, the team leader must ensure that the enroute recorder keeps a detailed log of any signs of enemy activity, aircraft movement, or any other information the leader may designate. When on an observation post or a reconnaissance, a team member must keep detailed logs and make objective sketches (or have the most skilled artist on the objective make them). The more detailed the sketch and the information, the more valuable it will be to the S-2.

As often as possible, each member of the team should copy the information and the sketches of the other team members. The Ranger concept of the "lone survivor" is a very real possibility. The more this soldier has when he returns, the more valuable he will be to the intelligence agencies.

Two other important considerations for the mission are the team's ability to report information quickly and accurately and its ability to react to changes in the situation or the mission. The team's ability to report depends upon functioning equipment and good site selection for communication. Using aerial photos during the planning process will aid site selection.

In case transmissions are being jammed or the equipment is inoperative, however, the team should have a planned "no-commo" resupply. This also applies if, after a set period, there is no communication between the team and the base radio station. After this time period, another option is to use the escape and evasion plan. Before resorting to either of these plans, however, the team should take every possible step to ensure that it has good communication.

To ensure its ability to react to changes in the situation or the mission, which will happen frequently, the team must be self-reliant and flexible, because tasking agencies may not be able to support these changes.

If the situation becomes unfavorable, or the team is compromised, the escape and evasion plan may have to be executed. This plan must allow for execution during each phase of the mission, and must be well coordinated with the supporting units. Although our team's plan could have been better, we were fortunate enough to link up safely with a familiar element when we executed it. The fact that an LRS team is not uniformed and equipped like conventional units can lead to problems when it encounters other units. The thorough coordination of the team's recognition signals for friendly units and aircraft will also reduce the team's chances of being shot by friendly forces.

The LRS team participates in two debriefings at the JRTC, each requiring different information. First, it briefs the forward unit commander or his S-2 on any intelligence that is of immediate importance to his area of operations (AO). The team does not divulge information that is not pertinent to the commander's AO and mission. It does maintain security and refrain from discussing its identity or its mission.

The team then exfiltrates to an isolation area for a formal debriefing with the commander (or his representative) and the G-2. The team should be given adequate time to prepare for this second debriefing. Patrol logs should be consolidated and arranged chronologically, and any cryptographic material should be accounted for and collected. Objective sketches should be compiled, and any film used should be collected with a photographic log attached to it. This log should include the date, time, and location, and a description of the photograph. Overlays with map changes and routes are also used in the debriefing.

The formal debriefing follows a specific format, and each member briefs a portion of the mission. Again, this builds experience and morale. Maps, overlays, or terrain models should be used to increase effectiveness and clarity, as well as to illustrate key points. All information should be briefed; even something that seems trivial may have great value to the intelligence community.

Although this debriefing can be considered an after action review (AAR) for the mission, a formal AAR should be conducted following a short rest and refit period. The AAR is an excellent tool when conducted properly. Team members need to be honest about what happened, and either the team leader or the observer–controller attached for the mission needs to keep the AAR focused.

The JRTC offers an excellent environment for building a cohesive and effective LRS team. The intensive training will build the competence levels of all the team members. Most important, it provides lessons that are quickly learned, particularly in the development and implementation of a team METL, mission planning, and improved flexibility and reaction to changes in the mission.

The time and effort invested in contingency planning during the isolation period has potentially high payoffs when time is short and changes occur. Additionally, the proper use of liaison officers in all phases—isolation, mission, and extraction—is key to success. This is especially crucial when a linkup with forward friendly units is planned. The JRTC provides endless possibilities and, with proper planning and training, will produce a highly skilled and combat-ready LRS team.

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